

Message Text

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43

ACTION EUR-25

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SUBJECT: ELECTION OUTLOOK

REF: BRUSSELS A-41

1. SUMMARY. LINGUISTIC ISSUES AND REGIONALIZATION OF BELGIUM'S GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS WILL BE THE MAIN ISSUES IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN JUST BEGUN BUT THE SOCIALISTS WILL ALSO TRY TO EXPLOIT THE ENERGY CRISIS BY ADVOCATING A MORE RADICAL PROGRAM THAN HERTOFORE. FIFTY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WILL RETIRE, THUS CONTINUING THE REJUVENATION OF PARLIAMENT BEGUN WHEN SIXTY MEMBERS RETIRED IN 1971. END SUMMARY.

2. REJUVENATION. WITH COMPLETION OF PARTY LISTS AND PARTY
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PLATFORMS LAST WEEK, 1974 PARLIAMETARY ELECTION CAMPAIGN

IS UNDERWAY IN EARNEST. ONE RESULT ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED IS THE RETIREMENT FROM PARLIAMENTARY POLITICS OF SOME 50 DEPUTIES AND SENATORS, INCLUDING AT LEAST 15 FORMER CABINET MINISTERS AND ALL THE OLDER LEADERS OF THE FLEMISH WING OF THE BELGIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (BSP). ONE EXCEPTION IS BSP CO-PRESIDENT JOS VAN EYNDE WHO WAS GIVEN DISPENSATION FROM THE SOCIALIST PARTY'S NEW 65-YEAR AGE LIMIT FOR PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES. FOLLOWING RETIREMENT OF SOME 60 DEPUTIES AND SENATORS AT THE TIME OF THE LAST PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN NOVEMBER 1971, NEW RETIREMENTS WILL MEAN THAT WELL OVER ONE-FOURTH OF BELGIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS WILL HAVE BEEN REPLACED IN THE PAST TWO AND HALF YEARS. NEW DEPARTURES WILL HIT SOCIALISTS HARDEST; ONE-FOURTH OF SOCIALIST DEPUTIES WILL BE REPLACED WITH YOUNGER, MOSTLY MORE DOCTRINAIRE MEMBERS.

3. REGIONAL SITUATIONS. IN THE TWO REGIONS OF FLANDERS AND WALLONIA, THE CONTEST IS ESSENTIALLY AMONG FIVE PARTIES: THE THREE TRADITIONAL PARTIES - THE SOCIAL CHRISTIANS, SOCIALISTS, AND FREE ENTERPRISE LIBERALS -- AND TWO LINGUISTIC/FEDERALIST PARTIES -- THE FLEMISH NATIONALISTS (VOLKSUNIE) IN FLANDERS AND THE MILITANTLY REGIONALIST WALLONIAN RALLY (RW) IN WALLONIA. IN THE BRUSSELS REGION, THE SITUATION IS MARKED BY THE FACT THAT, FOR THE FIRST TIME, ALL THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES HAVE FIELDDED TWO LISTS-- ONE FLEMISH AND ONE FRANCOPHONE. THIS IS ELOQUENT TESTIMONY TO ACCEPTANCE EVEN BY THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES OF LINGUISTIC/FEDERALIST THESES. THE BRUSSELS SITUATION IS COMPLICATED BY THE EMERGENCE OF A JOINT LIST TACTICALLY UNITING TWO FRANCOPHONE FORMATIONS-- THE MORE RADICAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF FRANCOPHONES (FDF) AND TWO MORE CONSERVATIVE SPLINTER PARTIES, THE PLDP AND LIP, THAT BROKE AWAY FROM THE LIBERALS IN 1971. THE OUTLOOK IN THE BRUSSELS REGION IS FOR LOSSES FOR THE THREE TRADITIONAL PARTIES (NOW HOLDING 24 SEATS) AND GAINS FOR THE FDF (NOW HOLDING 10 SEATS).

4. QUESTION MARKS. THE DECISION OF THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES IN BRUSSELS TO CEASE MAINTAINING A UNIFIED LIST OF BOTH LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES ACKNOWLEDGES THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ISSUES OF LANGUAGE AND REGIONALIZATION IN ALL PARTS OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONTRY AND PRESAGES GAINS BY THE NON-TRADITIONAL LINGUISTIC PARTIES. AT PRESENT THE CHIEF QUESTION MARKS APPEAR TO BE

- THE EXTENT OF LINGUISTIC/FEDERALIST PARTY GAINS;
- WHICH OF THE TWO LEADING PARTIES (CATHOLICS AND SOCIALISTS) WILL DO BETTER AND THUS EARN FIRST CRACK AT FORMING A GOVERNMENT;
- WHETHER THE THREE TRADITIONAL PARTIES WILL HAVE ENOUGH

SEATS TO BE ABLE TO IMPLEMENT AND EVOLUTIONARY AND MODERATE
FEDERALISM IN THE FACE OF MORE EXTREME DEMANDS FROM THE
LINGUISTIC/FEDERALIST PARTIES.

5. INCREASED RADICALIZATION OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY.
THE SOCIALIST PARTY (PSB/BSP) AFTER BRINGING DOWN A
GOVERNMENT HEADED BY ITS OWN REPRESENTATIVE HAS NOW
ADOPTED A MORE RADICAL CAMPAIGN PLATFORM, WITH DEMANDS FOR
MORE GOVERNMENT SUPERVISION AND CONTROL OF THE ECONOMY, AND
FOR DIRECT GOVERNMENT PARTICIPATION IN THE ENERGY SECTOR.
THE SOCIALIST PLATFORM ALSO SUPPORTS LIBERALIZING ABORTION
LEGISLATION AND BRINGING PAROCHIAL AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS
UNDER ONE ROOF, AS THE SOCIALIST VERSION OF THE "PLURALISTIC
SCHOOL".

6. ENERGY PROBLEM. THE SOCIALIST PARTY IS BANKING ON
EXPLOITATION OF THE ENERGY CRISIS AND THE VULNERABILITY
OF THE LARGE OIL COMPANIES TO POPULAR SUSPICION AS THE BEST
WAY TO RADICALIZE ITS PROGRAM AND STILL INCREASE ITS VOTES.
TESTING OF THE WISDOM OF THIS TACTIC WILL BE ONE OF
THE MORE SIGNIFICANT RESULTS OF THE COMING ELECTIONS.
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